

Special Analysis

EL SALVADOR: Duarte's First 100 Days

President Duarte has markedly enhanced El Salvador's image at home and abroad by asserting his authority over the armed forces and working to improve the country's human rights situation. His first 100 days have been relatively calm, but have seen no real progress in resolving economic problems or developing a national war strategy.

Duarte's Achievements

The 58-year-old Christian Democrat has achieved several key objectives:

- Establishment of his authority as the first popularly elected civilian president in El Salvador in more than a half a century.
- Seizure of the political spotlight from the insurgents.
- Increased support from Western governments.

He also has made a good impression during trips to Europe and the US. Next week he will visit three of the four Contadora countries—Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama—to discuss regional issues and try to gain additional support for his government.

Duarte has calmed many of the fears among conservative civilians and the military that he is bent on partisan retribution and reckless reform. He has shown patience and common sense in asserting his constitutional authority as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.

He appears to be gaining the respect of many top military leaders. Both Defense Minister Vides and Chief of Staff Blandon, for example, cooperated in implementing timely command changes designed to enhance presidential control of the military and to improve its human rights performance. Several Army field officers suspected of political intrigue and human rights abuses have been transferred, and a new post has been created to oversee the operations of the various paramilitary security forces.

Scores of police personnel have also been transferred or dismissed, and stricter procedures have been established for the arrest and interrogation of prisoners. Leading church officials have praised Duarte's efforts in helping to reduce political violence.

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[REDACTED]

The legislative assembly recently approved Duarte's funding request for a judicial reform commission, which probably will act soon on his proposal to have a special unit investigate a variety of cases, including the assassination of Archbishop Romero and the murder or disappearance of US citizens. [REDACTED]

Major Problems

Duarte was elected without a clear political platform or peace plan and will be hard put to mobilize the military, the private sector, and the bureaucracy behind a coherent war strategy and pacification program in the near term. [REDACTED]

Prospects remain poor for integrating the extreme left into the electoral process next March. Insurgent leaders continue to decline to take part in peace talks aimed at a cease-fire and in elections, and Duarte rejects sharing power with the guerrillas. [REDACTED]

Duarte's administration is particularly weak on economic issues. The ruling Christian Democrats have opted not to include conservative financial leaders and technocrats in economic planning. [REDACTED] believes Duarte's party is unlikely to win control of the legislature in March, however, which may force the administration to seek a working arrangement with the rightist opposition. [REDACTED]

Outlook

The relative calm associated with Duarte's first months in office is unlikely to endure. Military, political, and economic pressures almost certainly will mount as the country approaches the legislative and municipal elections. [REDACTED]

The most immediate challenge may be the guerrillas' planned fall offensive, although Duarte and his military advisers appear confident of containing any rebel initiative. In any event, US material, financial, and advisory support will be essential if Duarte is to transform his psychological successes into concrete solutions to deal with the national crisis. [REDACTED]